

A Short History of the George Washington Patterson House

The historic G. W. Patterson House and ranch in Fremont provide the focal point for Ardenwood Historic Farm. The house has a complicated history, with frequent additions and remodeling.



Close up of Patterson House
Lithograph from Thompson
& West Atlas, 1878. Note
the milk house and swing set
off behind the house, and the
original kitchen on the left
side of the house

The earliest parts of the house date to approximately 1857. 1857 was a significant year for George Patterson. After nearly 6 years of farming in Washington Township, first as a farm hand, then on leased land, on Dec 1, 1856, he had made his first land purchase, including the land where the house sits.

George now owned his own land, and suddenly he had a family as his mother Lydia and brother Henry moved from Indiana to California to live with him. We believe, but are not certain that George turned to local carpenter and builder James Hawley, who had built a number of local buildings, including the first frame hotel in Mission San Jose, and the second Vallejo flour mill at the entrance of Alameda Canyon in today's Niles district to build the original Patterson House.

There are no known photos of this original house, but a lithograph of the house and farm was included in Thompson & West's 1878 Atlas of Alameda County.



The original house was a relatively simple, with only 5 rooms; a parlor, a dining room, two bedrooms upstairs, with a shed style addition containing the kitchen on the rear of the building. While simple, the lithograph show interesting details including a porch and balcony running along the front of the house, and a half round window high on the gable end. (this window frame can still be found in the attic of the house today)

Round window detail from
Thompson & West



Original Samuel Newsom plans for the Victorian addition, showing the East elevation including the 1857 kitchen on the far left.

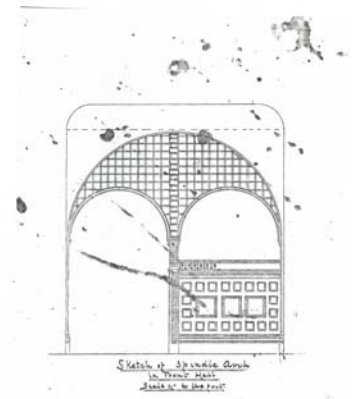
In 1889 George and Clara Patterson, after 12 years of marriage, added the grand Queen Anne addition. To build this portion of the house, they turned to Samuel Newsom, one of the leading architects in San Francisco and the west. Construction started in the fall. The work was significant enough to warrant a newspaper article about their plans.

"The new home of George Patterson will prove one of the handsomest in the valley when completed. It is built in Queen Anne style, the rooms large and finished off in native woods. Some of the carving in front of the house is very fine." (Oakland Inquirer August 1, 1889)

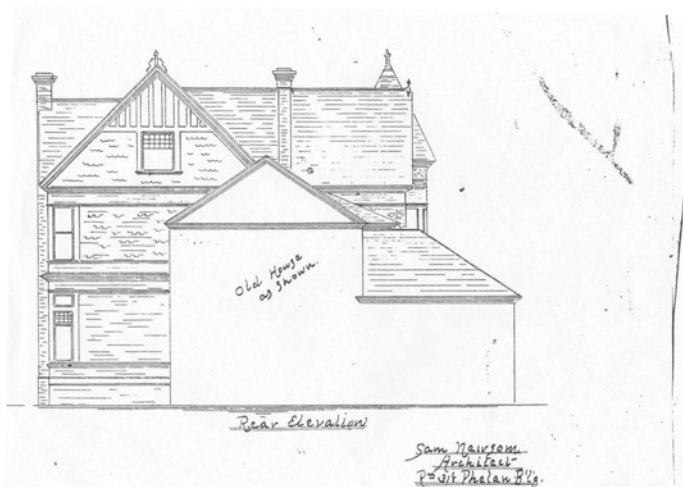
The Queen Anne addition was spectacular, and featured all of the elements which identify a building as a Queen Anne, including the tower, the interesting variety of windows, and the mix of shingles, siding and carvings. The entrance arch was design was repeated in the interior, with the grand "spool arch" shown on the drawings.

Six of the original drawings Samuel Newsom prepared prior to building the Victorian addition survive in the collections of the Patterson House. These show many of the details found on the house today, along with a few hints about the original 1857 home, including a drawing of the kitchen.

The Victorian changed the very nature of the home. The front door had previously faced the South, but now the house faced West. The new addition included three bedrooms, and two parlors and two bathrooms. We assume they remodeled older part of the home but just don't have much information that work..



Samuel Newsom drawing of the "Spool Arch" located in the entry of the house



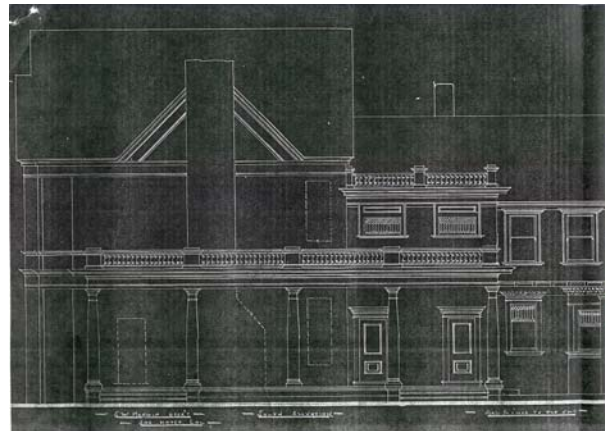
Rear elevation with the "old house" shown as in silhouette only.



Side view of the Patterson house circa 1897 from a family album. Note the small porch and the two windows of the office with a balcony above

Evidence suggests that soon after completing the Victorian addition, possibly in 1890, a second one room addition was added, an office for George. So far we have not found a record of this work, but photos show this small one story addition.

The final addition to the house was made in 1915, prompted by the births of Henry and Sara Patterson's three daughters, Sally, Marjory and Georgia. They apparently considered several proposals for this work, including one with columned porches and balconies wrapping around the building before deciding on one of the simplest. The work included enclosing the porches and balconies on the South side of the house, creating today's "1915" bathroom (complete with a babies bathtub for the girls), the nursery, and the sun porch – sewing room. On the North side of the house they removed the original kitchen wing. Finally, to the east they added a new two story addition, with a large bedroom for the girls upstairs (today's docent room) and a new kitchen downstairs. This work would have included a final redesign of the interior of original 1857 home, including the upstairs hallway, needed to access the new wing, along with the big picture windows in the dining room and smoking room. Finally they removed the small side porch off the Family parlor and installed the large wrap around porch which survives today.



E. W. Moran Drawings of proposed changes to the Patterson House., circa 1910 from the house collection



Henry and Sara would consider other work in the 1920's including an extensive remodel which would have transformed the house into a Mission style home, complete with seven arches along the South face and a port-cohere. Instead they chose to build a new home in Piedmont California, and kept our Patterson Mansion as a summer home.